

LERNER DEPARTMENT STORE
3105-09 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington
Virginia

HABS VA-1282
VA-1282

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LERNER DEPARTMENT STORE

HABS No. VA-1282

Location: 3105-09 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington County, Virginia. The building was demolished in June 1990 and the site slated for re-development by Phillips Development Corporation in Bethesda, Maryland.¹

Significance: The Lerner Department Store was one of several structures built in the 1940s during Clarendon's emergence as a commercial center. It was an addition to the adjacent Hahn Shoe Building and shared its Moderne architectural aesthetics. It was designed by E. Burton Corning and Raymond G. Moore, architects, and the building permit issued in November 1948.

Description: The department store was constructed of brick and reinforced concrete and faced with limestone tiles. The one-story building had a rectangular footprint and was covered by a flat roof. Polished granite provided accents to the fenestration; window trim was made of aluminum. Plans indicate the building had two entrances off of Wilson Boulevard, with a deep vestibule at No. 3105. This vestibule was to have a terrazzo floor. A similar entry was suggested for No. 3109, but that for No. 3107 differed in depth, level of finish, and placement. It was left of center and highlighted by recessed lighting. Plans also show that a second-floor addition to the building was anticipated; in due course, the second story appeared after 1949.²

History: The Lerner Department Store shares an ownership history with the Hahn Shoe Building, the property for which was transferred to the Spaulding Building Corporation in 1941. In 1965 stakeholder Harry Kaplan obtained ownership of the property and held it until 1982 when he sold it to 3100 Wilson Associates. The 3100 group flipped it to Hartford Associates in 1988. The department store vacated the building by 1978 and the interior was subdivided to accommodate several smaller businesses; other tenants, including the Singer Sewing Machine Company (originally in 3107) and Bakers Shoes (in 3109), also left in the early 1970s. By 1976 Mekong Grocery occupied the store fronts at 3107 and 3109 Wilson Boulevard.³

¹ Kevin Bushweller, "Razing Hits Little Saigon," *Journal* 18 June 1990.

² Judy Temple, "The Lerner-Hahn Building," unpublished paper 31 October 1988, 6-7.

³ Temple, 8; Arlington County Land Records, Deed Book 1590, folio 626; Arlington County Land Records, Deed Book 2060, folio 1166; Arlington County Land Records, Deed Book 2312, folio 679.

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Documentation of the Hahn Shoe Building (HABS No. VA-1281) and the Lerner Department Store was done to mitigate the impending loss of several historic Arlington County buildings, including those in the 3100 block of Wilson Boulevard. Below is an image taken by John C. Schwartz, photographer, in spring 1990.



ADDENDUM TO:
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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LERNER DEPARTMENT STORE

This report is an addendum to a two-page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 3105-09 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Hartford Associated Limited Partnership, 6106 MacArthur Boulevard, Bethesda, Maryland.

Present Use: Demolished in June 1990.

Significance: Together with the Hahn Shoe Building (HABS No. VA-1281), the Lerner Department Store anchors the east end of the Clarendon business district. It is one of several structures built in the 1940s during Clarendon's second building boom. Because of its siting at the corner of an unusual intersection, it was one of the most prominent buildings in the Clarendon Historic District.

Historian: Estella K. Bryans-Munson, Spring 1990.

Project Information: This documentation project was coordinated by the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc., with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation, to mitigate the impending loss of several historic Arlington County buildings. Estella K. Bryans-Munson served as project historian, and John C. Schwartz was the large-format photographer.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1948.

2. Architect: E. Burton Corning and Raymond G. Moore.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Lerner Department Store occupied lots 3,4,5 and part of lot 6 in Clarendon. Records are located in the Arlington County Office of Virginia Land Records. The following is an incomplete chain of title:

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Deed of Trust dated 7 July 1965: Deed Book 1590, p. 626.

Deed dated 20 April 1982: Harry Kaplan and Anna D. Kaplan to 3100 Wilson Boulevard Associates. Deed Book 2060, p. 1166.

Deed dated 19 January 1988: 3100 Wilson Boulevard Associates and Donald W. Konz, trustee, to Hartford Associates Limited Partnership. Deed Book 2312, p. 679.

4. Builder: Spaulding Building Corporation.

5. Original plans and construction: Plans by E. Burton Corning and Raymond G. Moore for the "Spaulding Building" are located in Arlington County's Planning Office.

6. Alterations and additions: The interior of the building was altered significantly in 1977 to create spaces for the small shops of a Vietnamese mini-mall. The following information was obtained from the building permit files:

30 November 1971: permit #3951 to install partitions in the Lerner Department Store; permit #4314 for the repair of the slag roof by District Roofing Company.

18 August 1977: permit #13695 for alterations to the existing building (3103-05)

10 September 1981: permit #4022 for installation of a 12'6" x 11'6" crank operated steel rolling door with locking bottom bar (at 3107, Western Union).

B. Historical Context

The Lerner Department Store and Hahn Shoe Building (HABS No. VA-1281) occupied a block at the east end of the Clarendon commercial district. The original tenant, Hahn Shoes, was one of several chain stores that opened in Clarendon during the 1940s. The influx of chain stores coincided with an increase in the population of the Washington metropolitan area during and after World War II. In 1940, the county population numbered 57,040, then by 1950, it was 135,449.

The twenty-five acre village of Clarendon was founded in 1900; the boundaries were Jackson Street on the west, and Highland and Herndon streets on the east, with Wilson Boulevard bisecting the area. The electric trolley line of the Washington, Arlington and Falls Church Railway, installed in 1907, emanated from here to link up with two other lines that served downtown Washington to Mount Vernon, and Rosslyn to Fairfax. These facilities served the new businesses that sprang up along Wilson Boulevard as well as residents of the fledgling

subdivision. The area was wired for electricity in 1913, and telephone service in 1920; the C&P central office here could accommodate 750 households. The community also boasted its own baseball team and a citizens' hall. In 1922, when Clarendon was the "most populous village in the county," its application for independent town status was denied by the state supreme court, because Arlington was "a continuous, contiguous and homogeneous community."

"Constructed in 1948, the Lerner [Department Store], a national women's clothing store chain, added to Clarendon's prominence as a major retail center for Arlington and neighboring communities."¹ In addition to the Lerner Shop, Singer Sewing Machines and Crosby Shoes were also tenants. Later tenants included Baker Shoes, Western Union, and the Mekong Center. The Lerner Shop moved out of the building in 1977. In 1978, following an interior renovation and partitioning of the building into three sections, the Pacific Oriental Department Store, the Mekong Center, and Western Union became tenants. The use of the building by Pacific Oriental and the Mekong center reflects demographic changes in the Washington area, which attracted many Southeast Asian refugees following the Vietnam War.

The historic character of the neighborhood began to decline during the second half of the century. Clarendon was chosen as the location of one of the ten Metrorail subway stations in the county, 12.2 miles of which is within its borders. Construction proceeded from the late 1960s until 1979 and surely contributed to the shift in character; concurrently, the decline of traditional businesses in the neighborhood was coupled with an influx of Southeast Asian refugees following the end of the Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon in 1975. By 1980, 5 percent of Arlington's citizens were of Asian or Pacific origin.

Post-demolition, the site today remains undeveloped, although construction is planned for the future. The Clarendon neighborhood is still in flux, though there is evidence of a very slow economic revival.

Part II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Streamline Moderne building is a relatively spare brick and concrete structure faced with limestone tiles.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good, prior to demolition.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall size: 66' wide x 127' deep, with 16,764 (gross floor area) square feet.

¹ HALRB Survey, 1985.

2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete and concrete block.
3. Wall construction: Brick faced with limestone tiles.
4. Structural system, framing: Concrete-block and brick.
5. Chimneys: One metal chimney is flush with the north wall.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: South façade: There are three doorways in this façade; all three doors are made of plate-glass and set in metal frames. The door at the west end is a single door while the other two are double doors. All have metal hardware. The doors are recessed into the façade about 10' thus creating display-window areas. All of the doorways are flanked by narrow sidelights. West façade: One door recessed into the façade about 5' is located near the north end. The glazed panel door is set in a wood frame with an architrave of blue tiles set flush with the wall. North façade: The three doors here are accessed by short flights of concrete stairs (four risers each) with pipe railings. All three doors feature glazing covered with iron bars; the frames are made of plain wood.
 - b. Windows: South façade: The full front façade at the first floor level was once composed of display windows and entryways. However, the display area at the west end of the façade has been covered with limestone tiles similar to those cladding the rest of the building. West façade: A band of windows with metal trim spans the northern two-thirds of the façade. Six casement windows remain at the south end of the band; the remaining window area has been in-filled with corrugated sheet metal. North façade: At the first-floor level there are three windows. West of both doors are four-light windows set in a wood frame. Directly above one (red-trimmed) window is a band of three one-over-one light sash set in metal frames. The sills are one row of brick headers. On the second floor, a band of windows, probably identical to those on the west façade, has been filled with flat metal sheeting, vents, and ductwork. This is probably to accommodate the kitchen installed on the second floor for the Vietnamese restaurant and grocery store.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat; concealed by an asymmetrical stepped parapet.
 - b. Cornice: Cast-concrete with no detailing.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. Cellar: Western Union section: One room divided into smaller areas with partitions of chicken wire stapled to 2"x4"s. The Mekong Center section: Two rooms. The small room to the east of the stairs contains heating equipment. A long and narrow room occupies the rest of the space and contains a walk-in refrigerator. Pacific Oriental section: Unknown.
 - b. First floor: Western Union section: The front doors opens into a room spanning the width of the unit. A door in the south partition accesses a room that occupies the former display-window area. A door in the north wall access a long, narrow room and a small hall with an east-west axis. The hall leads to another hall, with a north-south axis, which runs to the rear (north) of the unit. The east wall of the hall is lined with electronic communications equipment; the area to the west is divided into small spaces with partitions of chicken wire attached to 2"x4"s. The north-south hall terminates in a vestibule at the back door. Stairs to the second floor originate on the east near the end of the hall' those to the basement originate on the west wall, next to the bathroom. Pacific Oriental section: One large two-story high room with two rows of pillars. A free-standing island east of the rear door served as a sales counter. Built-in cabinets line the bottom of the east wall. A doorway in the east wall leads into a stairwell. The Mekong Center section: Access denied, but according to a spokesman for the owner, it is a smaller version of the Pacific Oriental space.
 - c. Second floor: Western Union section: The second-floor level here contains one room that is accessed by a single-turn wood stair with wood balusters and banister. Pacific Oriental/The Mekong Center section: Accessed by a curved stair and an elevator; both open into a large room that occupies about two-thirds of the floor space at the north end of the building. Partitions at the south end create four small rooms, entered through doorways that have no doors. West of the main room is a space that housed the Pacific Restaurant. The kitchen and bathroom facilities for the restaurant are north of this.
2. Stairways: Western Union section: A single-turn stair with wood risers, balusters, and banister provides access to the second floor. A straight-run concrete stair with pipe railings goes to the cellar. Both stairs originate in the north end of the first-floor hallway. Pacific Oriental section: All stairs to the service areas such as the cellar and storage areas are made of concrete and have pipe railings. A single-turn stair runs between the first floor and the cellar. A spiral stair made of concrete covered with red carpet connects the two sales floors. The spiral stair has a wood railing attached to the wall with brass-finish hardware.

3. Flooring: Concrete, except on the second-floor of the Western Union space. In the Western Union section, the cellar floor is made of concrete. The first-floor rooms have brown wall-to-wall carpeting. The north-south hall floor features linoleum tile. The bathroom floor is tiled. The second floor has narrow pine boards covered with a tan carpet. In the Pacific Oriental/The Mekong Center section of the building, the cellar floor is made of concrete and the carpeting has been removed from the first floor. The second floor has red carpeting over the concrete except in the kitchen, hall, and bathroom areas. These floors are covered with linoleum tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the Western Union section of the building the three rooms at the south end of the first floor are covered with imitation wood paneling. The rooms at the north end are defined by chicken wire attached to wood framing. The east wall of the hall is covered with a large electrical panel. The room ceilings are acoustical tile, whereas the hall ceiling is plaster painted white. On the first floor of the Pacific Oriental/The Mekong Center section the walls are made of plaster and painted white. Wallpaper with a bamboo design covers the west wall adjacent to the curved stairs. On the second floor there are a variety of wallpapers in the main room and bathrooms. Walls of the restaurant area feature faux-wood paneling. Partitions at the south end of the unit are painted white. All ceilings are dropped acoustical tile.

5. Doorways and doors: There are panel doors with flat wood trim throughout the Western Union section of the building; the only extant interior doors in the Pacific Oriental section are those leading to the bathrooms on the second floor. These too are paneled.

6. Lighting fixtures: In the Western Union section there are fluorescent fixtures throughout, though most were removed by May 1990. In the Pacific Oriental section there are also fluorescent fixtures and some incandescent fixtures in the bathrooms and stairwells.

7. Heating: Oil furnace.

D. Site

The Lerner Department Store is located at the corner of Wilson Boulevard and Herndon Street. It is adjacent to the Hahn Shoe Building (HABS No. VA-1281) and across Wilson Boulevard from the Clarendon subway station.

Part III. Sources of Information

A. Historic Photographs

Historic views have been published in the Nethertons' book, *Arlington County in Virginia*; see pages 171, 212-13.

B. Primary and Unpublished Sources

Arlington County Deed Books. Office of the Clerk of the Court. Arlington, Virginia.

Building Permit Index Card Files. Arlington County Planning Office.

Historic Arlington Landmarks Review Board. "Historic Resources in the Clarendon Commercial District." Report to the Arlington County Board, May 1985.

Netherton, Nan and Ross. *Arlington County in Virginia: A Pictorial History*. Norfolk: The Donning Company, 1987.

Real Estate Tax Assessment Files.

Rebeck, Andrea. "Reassessment of Clarendon Commercial District Arlington County, Virginia." Report prepared for the Arlington County HALRB, 24 April 1989.

Temple, Judy. "The Lerner Hahn Building 3101-09 Wilson Boulevard, Clarendon, Virginia." Unpublished report, 31 October 1988.

Virginiana Collection, Arlington County Public Library.

C. Published Sources

Hill Directory Company. *Hill's Arlington County (Virginia) Directory*. Richmond: 1955.

League of Women Voters of Arlington, Virginia. *Arlington Community Guide*. 6th ed. Arlington: League of Women Voters and Arlington County Government, 1989.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Consulted

The photographic archives of the Arlington Historical Society probably contain old views of the Lerner Department Store. The collection was closed for cataloguing during the course of this project.